The British Labor Movement.

— By Felix Morley. —

Final Article—Agricultural Unionism.

LONDON.—One of the outstanding and most significant features of the British Labor Movement today is the vigor and unanimity with which agricultural laborers are now lining up side by side with the indutsrial proletariat. Close to 400,000, ar nearly fifty percent of all the rural workers in Great Britain are now organized in the trade unions working in their behalf, a membership figure aproximately double that of a year ago. At the end of 1917 only about 100,000 agricultural laborers were organized.

No less striking than increase of membership, and to a growing extent bound up with it, is the birth of Socialistic spirit among the farm hands. A few years, and even months ago, all that the downtrodden agricultural workers of Great Britain thought about was an increase of wages which would enable them to sustain their families on a standard of moderate comfort and decency. Today communistic sentiment is a real factor and spreading rapidly. Particularly in Scotland the demand for nationalization of the land is too strong to be longer ignored by the government.

To understand this situation it is necessary to appreciate the present land system in Great Britain, a land system which is more medieval and intolerable than that of any other civilized state. It is fact, the recognition of which is by no means confined to labor circles, that the position of the English agricultural laborer today is in one vital respect worse than it was during the reign of William the Conqueror, over eight hundred years ago. In the year 1085 less than ten per cent. of the English agricultural population were completely divorced from land tenure. Today, at a moderate estimate, half of this same population are landless laborers not only with no chance whatever of achiving land ownership, but even without any hope of advancing from an economic and social position which is closely akin to that of the feudal serf. And while it is most marked in the case of the agricultural laborer the injustice of the English land system does not even end with him. A great majority of the so-called farmers, who employ this labor, are only tenant farmers subject to the autocratic control of a tiny minority of landowners who exact tribute from every tenant and rarely interest themselves in practical farming.

A few figures will make the situation clearer. There are at the present time somet'ing over 600,000 agricultural laborers of various types in England and Wales. There are something under 300,000 farmers and live-stock raisers, almost all of them tenants on other peoples' property. There are about 15,000 large landowners who in the aggregate own eighty per cent of all the land in England and Wales, exact heavy rents from those who till it and give hunting and shooting parties for their friends in return. That, in a nutshell, is the reason of the present agricultural unrets in Great Britain and the reason why "Hodge", as the farm laborer is called is now joining in with the labor movement in tens of thousands. Less than two per cent. of those who make their living off the land own eighty per cent. of that land and in spite of possesing give little or no service in return.

The first phase of the farm labor movement in England began in 1833 and is now ending. It was the phase, familiar in all industrial history, in which the serf class in its blind struggle for something more than a bare subsistence found itself opposed by an alliance of the middle and upper classes. In this case it was the struggle of the unaided farm laborer against an all-powerful combination of tenant farmers and landlords. The second phase promises to be very much shorter than the first and may end in the nationalization of the land in Great Britain. It will be characterized by a fighting alliance of the tenant farmers and their laborers on the one side as opposed to the parasitic landlord class on the other. This alliance is already in working operation in Scotland and is beginning to be formed in parts of England. Its watchword everywhere is "nationalize the land."

While the first agricultural laborers' union was launched in England in 1833 it was many years before organization began to make tangible headway. The chief reason for initial delays was the prompt action of the government, composed largely of "land gentry," in launching methods of terrorism against a movement in which they rightly say contain elements of danger to their comfortable position. It is interesting to note that the methods used in England then were very closely akin to those which seem to be popular in another great, English speaking Democracy today.

The cause of the founding of the union was a warning by the farmers that the current wages of seven shillings ($1.75) a week would shortly be reduced to six shillings ($1.50). The action of the government was to throw the six "evil-disposed" officers of this labor fledgling into jail and shortly afterwards to deport them to Australia.

There is not space here to discuss the long, up and down struggle for organization which characterized the history of English agricultural labor from 1833 until the late war. In the main these efforts were unsuccessful; at best the farm worker was difficult to organize, an isolated individual, unable to join his fellows in association as easily as the city worker. Add to this the fact that the ambitious among the agricultural workers migrated to industrial centers, that those who remained were hampered by the lethargy of ingorance, and that oppression of every sort was brought to bear upon the agricultural unions, and it is not surprising that August 1914 found the farm workers in a social position as debased as ever and drawing an average wage in England and Walls of just sixteen shillings ($4.00) a week.

Two factors have changed this situation almost overnight and account for the strong position of the agricultural today. The first of these is the entrance of the Workers' Union, t e most powerful organization in England cater-ing only to unskilled and casual labor, into the field of agricultural organization. The second factor is found in the passage of the Wheat Production Act, forced through parliament largely by virtue of German U-boat pressure in August 1917.

When the English agricultural laborer built up his own union he would start with an organization of a dozen or so members and a capital of a few dollars. Growth was slow and the first effort to ameliorate conditions brought pressure from the farmers and landlords, generally resulting in collapse. When the Workers' Union organized a special branch for agricultural labor it started with a membership of a quarter of a million and a bank account of several hundred thousand dollars. Merely by filling out his membership card in the Workers' Union the farmworker found himself linked up with the industrial strength of organized urban labor. This one step brought his ultimate emancipation nearer than eighty years of effort at independent organization had done.

One of the reasons which led the Workers' Union to organize the farm laborers, as told me by George Dallas in charge of the agricultural organization work, was the problem of having discontented or striking farm workers come to the cities and undercut the unskilled labor there. The reverse of this was also true; time and again where agricultural laborers would attempt a strike against an unfair landlord or farmer the latter would bring in unemployed from the cities to defeat the move. By successfully invading the agricultural field the Workers' Union has effectively protected both its rural and city members from scabbing of this sort, and tremendously strengtened the industrial power of both units It is note-worthy that the industrial organizers of the Workers' Union have been phenominally successful in lining up the farmhands as union members.

The importance to the movement of the other factor of success the Wheat Production Act, is found in its clause setting up representative committees throughout the country for the consideration of production, wages and other agricultural problems. On these committees the farm workers have an equal representation with the farmers, which meant in the first place a governmental endorsement of the agricultural workers' union as the only bodies able to elect farm laborers' representatives. Beyond this, however the power which they exert on these committes have taught the farm laborers and farmers to cooperate and to look forward to the time when agriculture will be a socialized industry free from land-lord control.

At every recent conference of farm laborers, delegates from every county in England have recorded the opinion that "no adequate solution of the rural problem is possible so long as the land is privately owned." In addition a minimum wage, "adequate to promote efficiency" has been established throughout England and Wales by the Wheat Production Act. Last spring this minimum was established for adult male farm workers at the ridiculously inadequate figure of thirty shillings a week for six day week of fifty-four hours in summer and fifty hours in winter.

The Workers' Union has achieved the most remarkable success in organizing the agricultural workers, and is of particular interest because of its successful combination of farm and in dustrial worker. It is not, however, at present numerally the most important of the rural unions. The Agricultural Laborers' Union, successfully re organized out of previous failures in 1912, is entirely of, by and for the farm workers, and has an enviable record of successes accomplished both by peaceful negotiation and, where negotiations were spurned, by strikes. In the county of Norfolk this union now exerts such power that no farmer will take on a "hand" unless the latter can show his union card. The A. L. U. now claims a membership of something over 200,000, and is growing steadily. The agricultural section of the Workers' Union numbers 150,000 and is also increasing.

In spite of a certain amount of rivalry there is a close executive harmony between these two bodies. Both are cooperating on the immediate aim of British agricultural labor — a basic 48 hour week with a minimum wage of fifty shillings, provisions which are likely to be forced through the forthcoming Parliament. Both are urging their members to vote the labor ticket and strengthen their political as well as their industrial position, the results of which propaganda are now seen in every by-election in agricultural districts.

The rapid emancipation of the agricultural workers, and the growing cooperation between him and the farmer against the absentee landlord, is one of the most significant features of the new England which has been born out of the war. The dukes and earls who own a majority of England are being faced with two alternatives—either take up agriculture as a serious business or sell out to those who will, and it is note-worthy that for the most part they are choosing the latter course Meantime the sentiment for nationalization of the land and communistic ownership is spreading.

One other factor growing out of the rural activity of the Workers' Union deserves stress. It is the close cooperation between agricultural and urban labor which is being developed. Something which, combined with the work of the Co-operative Societies, can be developed so as to eliminate the middleman whenever he operates as a food trust, and which is also paving the way towards an equitable food distribution in the cities, particularly valuable in the time of sudden emergency.

A Subject People

— By Scott Nearing —
Staff Writter, The Federated Press.

Popular sympathy recently aroused over the plight of "subject peoples" has gone out to Korea, India and Ireland. Now comes a report on "Labor Conditions in Porto Rico" written by Joseph Marcus (a special agent of the United States Employment Service) which strongly suggests the necessity of adding another to the long list of peoples which are denied "the right of self-determination."

The American flag has been flying over the island of Porto Rico for twenty years, yet the percentage of illiteracy is still abnormally high. During the year 1917 and 18 "only 142,846 children out of a total of 427,666 of school age actually enrolled in the public schools." The difficulty, sys Mr. Marcus, "lies in the bad economic condition" in which the worker finds himself. "Porto Rico is an island of wealthy land proprietors and of landless workers."

"There is a law in Porto Rico prohibiting any single individual from owning more than 500 acres of land ... With the American occupation the price of cane land rose very high -- from thirty to three hundred dollars per acre—and this induced many a small holder to sell his land and join the ranks of the laborers." Under these circumstances the law limiting land holdings was not enforced and at the present time "of the best land in Porto Rico 537,193 acres are owned and 229,203 acres are leased by 477 individuals, partnerships, or corporations from the United States Spain France and other countries."

The total wealth of the island is in the hands of fifteen per cent. of the population. Fourteen per cent. of the wealth is in the hands of native Porto Ricans. Sixty seven percent is owned by Americans.

Four fifths of the people of Porto Rico live in the rural districts. They build their little shacks on land that does not belong to them; they work when work is to be had on the nearest plantation; the men in a pair of trousers, a shirt and a straw hat. "Throughout the island thousands of children of the ages from one to seven years go naked, in the towns as well as in the rural districts."

When the laborer is at work he and his family share the following diet:

Breakfast—Black coffe, without milk and quite often without sugar.

Lunch—Rice and beans, or rice and codfish, or codfish and plantins.

Supper—The same as lunch.

This diet holds good while the laborer has steady work but during a large part of the year—five or six months—there is no work. "How he pulls through the slow season is a mystery to many who are interested in the welfare of the laborer."

The Porto Rican laborer is a sick man. "Hook-worm disea, anemia, etc. are very wide spread.

The low energy value of the diet together with the prevalence of sickness have so undermined the endurance of the Porto Rican laborer that a number of experiments in scientific diet carried on by the employers themselves, resulted in increasing the working capacity of the men from 50 to 100 per cent. Mr. Marcus finds that with an increase in wages which would enable the laborer to purchase some meat and dairy products, the charge of laziness and, inefficiency which are frequently lodged against the workers might well be withdrawn.

The investigation upon which Mr. Marcus bases his report about one dollar per day. Laborers in the busy season were paid ninety cents per day; in the slow season seventy cents. The working day is from ten to twelve hours. On the tobacco plantations men's wages during the busy season are from sixty to eighty cents a day and during the dull season from forty to sixty cents a day. Women receive from thirty-five to forty-five cents a day in the busy season and from twenty-five to thirty-five cents a day in the dull season. On the coffee plantations wages are lower. Men receive from fifty to sixty cents per day in the busy season and from thirty-five to forty-five cents per day in the dull season.

Mr. Marcus reports that the needle industry is making considerable headway in Porto Rico. Men's and children's suits are manufactured by women operators who earn from three dollars and fifty cents to five dollars per week. Embroidery manufacturing, lace making and drawn work pay from $1.25 to $4.00 per week. The work is done exclusively by women.

Detailed descriptions are given of living and working conditions in these and other industries. Enough has been said here to indicate very clearly that the American people, having assumed the responsibility for directing the lives of 1,118,012 Porto Ricans, are far behind the standard of "health and decency" which civilization prescribes as the minimum below which human beings cannot be expected to live and to work. There are subject peoples in Europe and Asia living under intolerable economic and social situations. There are also peoples in the West Indies subjets of the United States, whose life tragedy has been intensified rather than relieved by the presence of the capitalist imperialists from the North.

Larkin Conducts Own Case

Jim Larkin of the working class is on trial in New York City for being partly responsible for the Left Wing Program, which has to do with the new class-principles enunciated by the Third International. Jim Larkin is Irish and has an "A—No. 1" labor record in Ireland. But that is not what we are going to talk about.

Jim Larkin is on trial in New York City and he is going it alone. He decided he could make a better class fight than any lawer could make for him — and he is right. He is holding down the stage in Judge Week's court in such commendable style that we wish the whole world of workers could sit in and listen and see.

First let's say that if you'd ask the average native what employment people follow in New York City he'd tell you that there are ever so many machinists, carpenters, needle workers, railroad men, ordinary working folk. How comes it then that the jury panel in the courts show none of these workers in it? You'll only need one guess to guess why.

Here are the kind of folk that are being called to try Larkin: general insurance agent, carpenter superintendent, underwriter of surety, stock trader, chief cashier, cotton goods broker, treasurer for importers, etc. And now get this—one prospective juror confessed that he managed a co-operative store and one approved of the 1776 revolution and out both of them went by peremption by the prosecution.

The first thing Larkin did in acting in his own defense was to challenge the judge, claiming that the judge was prejudiced and had proven it in commending the conviction of Gitlow and Winnitzky, two communists previously sentenced by this same judge. The court decided, as could have been epected, that it was fit to sit in the case. The court and Larkin, all thru the selection of the jury, staged the class struggle in peppery language. The court, to facilitate presentation of the case, advised Larkin to take a lawyer. To this Larkin answered: 'I don't see that the form of presenting the truth matters very much."

Larkin insisted that the jury panel was not of his class and asked its dismissal. The judge refused. When a prospective juror seemed rattled about constitutional methods which might be persued to overthrow the government and admitted that he was not familiar with the constitution, Larkin said to him: "That is the reason why you have been specially selected." He asked this same juror that if a foreigner "like Christ came to this country, do you think he could become an American citizen." This horrified the court!

At a point when Judge Weeks and a prospective juror who thought that the reason the cost of living was high was because workers did not work long enough hours, engaged in a conversation about economics, Larkin broke in by remarking: "Pardon me for saying so, but I think that both do not know what they are talking about."

'What class do you belong to" is Larkin's hot shot. Most of those asked don't belong to any class and say they do not believe in classes. So much like the religious fanatic who said he did not belong to any world nor believe in things worldly.

A new trick was played upon those who are attending the Larkin trial, and the court room is crowded. At a specially well attended session the names and addresses of all who attended were taken. An attempt at intimidation, that's all.

We have had the "no defense" trial and the class trial with lawers instructed to make a class fight. But the best of them all, after all, is the kind that Larkin is conducting, for he meets his class enemies face on and words are not softened by passage thru a representative of the legal profession. There will be more of these tirals from now on.

— Voice of Labor.

LONDON.—With the most critical period in its history just ahead, the Triple Industrial Alliance of dockers, transportworkers, miners and railwaymen will meet May 5. Announcement of the plan was made by a subcommitee consisting of Harry Gooling and Robert Williams of the transport workers, Herbert Smith and Frank Hodges of the miners and J. H. Thomas and William Cramp of the railwaymen.

The purpose of the conference according to Williams, will be to deal with matters arising out of the previous conference and to strengthen the alliance in readiness to meet any tests that may come.

The statement is significant because of the fact that all three organizations are now in the midst of negotiation new demands. The railwaymen have put in a demand for a flat increase of one pound a week for all the men included in the January 1920 settlement, which involves a gross total of 17,000,000 pounds a year additional outlay. The transport workers are engaged in delicate negotiations in regard to the dockers' position, and a crisis in the tramways and road transport is imminent. The miners on April 15 after a ballot accepted the government's offer of two shillings a day raise, instead of three, but the situation is far from closed.

It is expected that the necessity for exerting powerful pressure upon the government will bring the three organizations into even closer relations following the conference.

PRISONERS DIFFER AS TO AMNESTY.

Comrade A. L. Sugarman, one of our political prisoners confined at Leavenworth, writes The Toiler that he, among others in Leavenworth are in disagreement with the statements regarding amnesty for political prisoners contained in the article recently published in the Toiler "What Political Prisoners thing of Amnesty," written by comrade Wm. Madison Hicks, "Comrade Hicks was not authorized to speak for the radicals here" writes Sugerman.

CECH SOCIALISTS WIN.

PRAGUE, April 24.—Returns from elections in Cecho-Slovakia indicate the new national assembly will have 120 Socialist members out of a total of 300. The Clericals, Agrarians and National Democrats form the reactionary block with approximately ninety-three votes. The party affiliations of the remainder of the members are scattered.

The Black Sheep.

Chapt. XXIX.
Delusions.

In the little log cabin by the lake Collins and Rudolph were absorbing book lore and cursing what Omar the Pagan called "The sorry scheme of things entire," These two were agreed on the general proposition that every thing in society needed cursing and in this work they co-operated beautifully. They were the Castor and Pollux in the firmament of invective. On all other subjects they differed as they differed in tempervment. They were like the diamond and charcoal which are both pure carbon but the one is inky black and the other sparklingly beautiful. So it was with these men, one was the incarnation of gloomy pessimism while the other had an abundance of optimistic faith in the latent power of the working class to emancipate itself from capitalistic thraldom. The fact is both had a measure of such faith, but in the one it sparkled and shone forth at all times in undimmed lustre, while in the other it was just present and often quite obscured by an exterior bitterness which gave him the appearance of being a misanthrop.

Rudolph was always sympathetic in his verabl dealing with human weakness; especially if these weaknesses were found in the working class. If a working man died it was because capitalism had exploited him and if he turned "high jack" and robbed his fellow workers of their hard earned coin then he could not help it. He would explain it as a result of his early bourgeois environment. With him a worker could do no wrong to a capitalist or a fellow worker. In the first place it was an act of class consciousness in the second a reflex of environment.

With Collins on the other hand the question was entirely different. He insisted on almost puritanical ethics within the working class. On all matters ot deparvity he took a Darwinian view. Still when it came to defining what constituted a workingman Collins was more liberal than Rudolph. In fact on this proposition their views were hopelessly at variance.

To Rudolph a proletarian was a man whom the process of machine development had robbed of his skill, his patriotism, his religion, in short of every thing but his ability to work when he found a purchaser in the labor market. A proletarian was a man who was forced to sell his life for the privilege of living. To him a man who possesses skill could not be a proletarian because he had something more to sell than his mere power to work. To fully appreciate the peculiarity of his views, on this subject his views on women are significant, to his mind women could not be classed as strictly working class creatures for when it became impossible for them to sell their labor power they were not like men forced to revolt but naturally fell back on the commercial value of their sex power, which he averred they would sell almost without exception rather then starve or fight. "How many of them do you find in the jungle, or hitting the road in search of a job?" he would ask. "They are more numerous than men and the lines of work that they can hold down are fewer so logically more of them ought to be out of employment. But they are not. At least you don't see them. They are biological bourgeois. They have something to sell besides their labor power. And before they go hungry they sell it." With this sentiment Collins would take violent issue. In fact his very inability to adequately answer Rudolph made him the more angry for it is evident that the Jew's statement while extremely unchivalrous has a natural element of truth.

On the question of what constituted a proletarian Collins had as has been indicated a more liberal view. To him any one who does anything that is in any way essential to the welfare and comfort of the human race as a whole, belonged to the working class providing however that in so serving mankind the individual was compelled to sell his power of hand or brain to another, who in turn sold the result of such work in the open market.

They had spent days on this subject. Arguing and reading, searching thru a stack of books and pamphlets, not with the object of finding the truth, or of reaching any basis or agreement. That is seldom done in any controversy. Both worked with a feverish intensity to prove each other wrong. They as individuals reflected the course of the entire radical movement in all its varigated branches. They worked like theologians endeavoring to hide the truth in order that they might establish their dogmas. The average radical leader like his theological brother has but one idea and, that is to build up a following for his particular brand of delusion, and his whole effort is expended not in the discovery of the truths of life but rather in a frantic effort to keep his fallacies from becoming apparent to his followers. It was this spirit which actuated the two men in the log cabin as it has actuated thousands in the radical movements of the world. The pity of it all is that these leaders and so called intellectuals are not dishonest. They actually believe that their particular form of delusion is the spirit that is to save the world. The average radical of today is but a throw back to the priest and medicine man of prehistoric times. It is the spirit of self justification, we might almost say self deification of those who assume leader ship of the masses that lies at the bottom of working class factions and the creeds of christiandom.

This is not the fault of economic science or of a science of sociology. The terms of these sciences are as well defined as any other descriptive or experimental science. In the realm of sociology and economics we are dealing with human interests and human affairs, and our concept of what constitutes our interest differes with temperament as well as economic conditions. That is the reason it is physically and socially impossible to unite the masses of mankind upon any set of principles no matter how well founded they may be in the facts of life.

The best brains in the working class differ according to temperament and will be followed by those who love and opposed by those who hate any given temperament regardless of the principle involved. It has been said that Jesse James had as many admirers in the United States as Billy unday. That does not mean that people are either religious fanatics or criminals; it simply proves that they follow those who are agressive according to temperament. The mass follows men. They do not recognize a principle as big as an elephant. To the crowd it is not truth, expedience, or mutual aid that determines conduct, but rather the attitude of their chiefs. "I am for Paul, I am for Apollos, I am for Wilson, for Roosevelt, for Debs, for Haywood" or for who not. The sheep follow the wethers. Economic circumstances cause power to gravitate in the direction of certain individuals and the masses to follow economically determiner leaders or newspapers until hunger exposes both leaders and papers as mere creatures of circumstance.

Even as the two friends in the cabin who loved and trusted one another could not agree upon so fundamental an issue as what constituted the working class so the great mass of mankind with all their different phases of mentality due to heredity and environment can not be expected to ever co-operate to any great extent except they be forced to do so by a stong central authority which recognizes the economic necessity for such co-operation. But I am digressing from the story.

Another source of continual controversy between these two friends was the question whether a worker had any interest in the national life of the land of his birth or adoption. I call attention to this because it is also a question which agitates the minds of all radicals and constitutes the blind rock upon which many a socialist ship has stranded. On this question they were agreed consciously and yet subconsciously they were miles apart.

They both derided the sentiment of patriotism as being a jingoistic fanaticism and in the very next breath Rudolph would be telling Collins that the United States had no such plains and woods as Russia, or that the life of the individual in the realm of the Czar was far richer in color and experience than that of the average American. To which Collins would reply with a recital of Russian Pogroms and the horrors of Siberia, the ferocity of the wolves and the illiteracy of the people, and as many other upleasant things as his fertile brain could think of. And Rudolph would return to the assault with a description of American egotism claiming that the world over, the very name American was a synonymn for "wind bag." He would then point out that Americans as such were absolutely unorganizable for any real social betterment; that they labored under the same delusions of freedom and democracy as their forefathers of a hundred years ago. Thus unconsciously each sung the praises of their native land from beyond the din of their wordy internationalism re-echoed the words of Scott "Breathes there the man with soul so dead, who never to himself has said 'this is my own my native land.'" Even as the silver horde goes back to the waters of its nativity, so these men were each defending and idealizing the land of their birth.

Their internationalism was intellectually sincere. Our intellect however is a growth of later years. Man has struggled on and up thru the countless pre-intellectual ages and carries within his brain the impressions of these ages. They have become an integral part of his subconscious being. They are facts of emotion which the play of intellect may obscure but can never eradicate and which when the proper irritation is applied will triumph over the intellect as the tidal wave will overflow the low land.

Radical education had made these men internationalists, yet basically they were tied as all men are tied by their heartstrings to the soil of their birth. If Rudolph had been possessed of the power he would have Russianized (not Czarized) America. And yet in him this instinct was not the strongest. He was a Jew and the Jew has for ages been a wanderer with out a land which he might claim as his own. Yet he was born in Russia, the steppes of Russia were in his blood, slavic speech was music to his ears. Enough of Russia had entered his being to make him a Russian.

If all this was true of Rudolph it was doubly ture of Collins, although both would have gone to the stake or the gallows defending their internationalism under certain conditions, yet under others Collins would have proven American ready to Americanize (not capitalize) the world.

Thus it was that they argued without end alternately accusing the other of dullness or wilful obstinacy. Both trying to explain away the ties by which they were bound to their natal soil, ties which are stronger than all human philosophies and which make it possible for radicals of all nations to kill each other in international wars.

It was during one of these seances of debate held over their dishwashing that Jack, mud bespattered and weary from his trip softly opened the door and stood listening. Collins was the first to see him. "God Almighty" he exclaimed "see what the cat dragged in."

(Continued next week.)